



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

European hare (*Lepus europaeus*)

Reid, N. (2016). European hare (*Lepus europaeus*). In L. Lysaght, & F. Marnell (Eds.), *Atlas of Mammals in Ireland: 2010-2015* (pp. 59-60). National Biodiversity Data Centre. <http://www.biodiversityireland.ie/product/atlas-of-mammals-in-ireland-2010-2015/>

Published in:

Atlas of Mammals in Ireland: 2010-2015

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

© 2016 Biodiversity Ireland.

This work is made available online in accordance with the publisher's policies. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

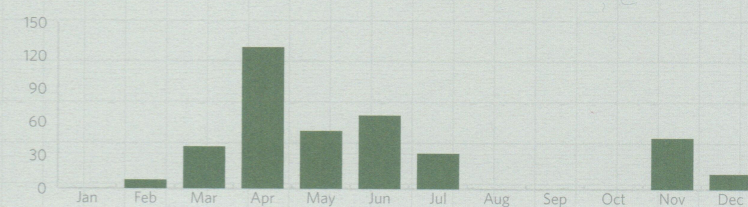
Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

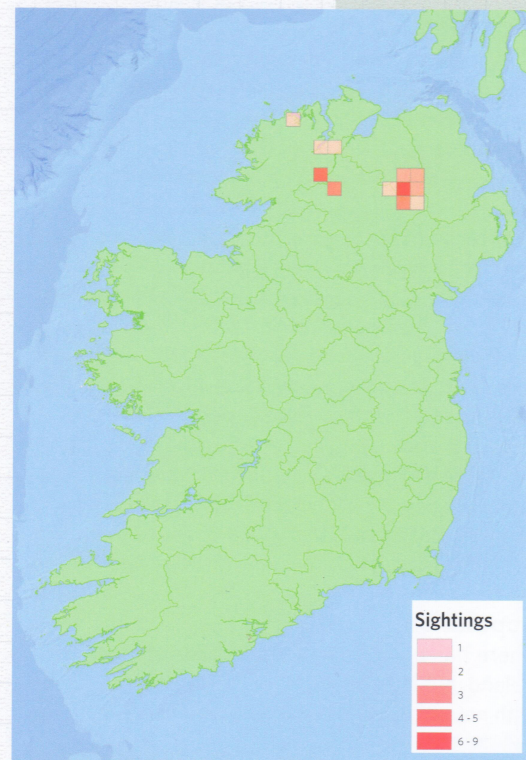
RED LIST STATUS

IRELAND: **NOT ASSESSED**
EUROPE: **LEAST CONCERN**
GLOBAL: **LEAST CONCERN**

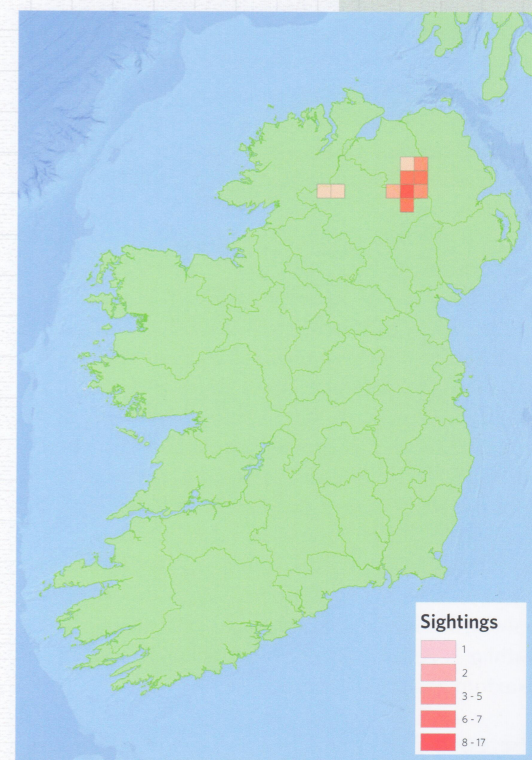
Sightings by month



Pre 2010



2010 - 2015



Total number of records: **402** / Number of 10km squares: **15**



European hare (Shutterstock)

European hare

Lepus europaeus

Pallas, 1778

OTHER COMMON NAME:

BROWN HARE

IRISH NAME:

GIORRIA EORPACH

LEGAL STATUS:

PROTECTED

Identification

The European hare, also known as the brown hare, is sometimes called the 'thrush' hare on account of its mottled coat which is a light sandy colour, but with dark guard hairs (32-35mm) projecting through the under- and pile-fur (15-27mm). It is much larger than the rabbit and whilst similar in body weight to the native Irish hare, it appears lankier with longer limbs and ears. The ears, when bent forward, are approximately the same length as the head and are extensively tipped with black. The tail is dorso-ventrally bisected with a black upper surface and a white lower surface (unlike the Irish hare which has a mostly white tail with slight greying on the upper surface). The European hare has a distinctive light stripe leading from around the eye to the nose; absent in the Irish hare. The European hare can also be distinguished by its leaping stride, distinct from a rabbit's scuttle and the Irish hare's more loping, rolling gait.

Distribution

The European hare is native to much of continental Europe, but has been introduced extensively elsewhere. It is a highly invasive species globally and was recorded as being introduced to Ireland up to 15 times at multiple locations throughout the island from 1848 to the 1890s for the purposes of field sport (Reid, 2011). Whilst occasional sightings are reported, none of these have been confirmed and all the populations from documented introductions appear to have become locally extinct except for a small number of animals still found near Baronscourt Estate, County Tyrone (last observed in 2012-13). A well established population was found in 2005 in Mid-Ulster, however, at a location without any known introduction. Studies suggest that this population may have been introduced as recently as the 1970s. The European hare's invasive range in Mid-Ulster expanded three-fold from 2005-06 to 2012-13 (see maps) and in southern Derry and east Tyrone the species is now locally common; indeed, the native Irish hare has all but disappeared from the invader's core range where it is outnumbered 5:1.

The invasive-native species replacement process is driven by a combination of ecological competition for space and resources, and extinction by hybridisation. Where the European hare was introduced to southern Sweden it has caused the complete extirpation of the native heath hare (*L. timidus sylvaticus*) from an area greater than the size of Ireland in less than 200 years; a worrying warning for the conservation of the endemic Irish hare (Reid and Montgomery, 2007).

Habitat

Elsewhere in its range, the European hare inhabits arable areas where cereal predominates, but in Ireland it can be found in lowland, intensive, improved grasslands dominated by Italian ryegrass. It prefers well drained, flat fields with a good line of sight to approaching predators. During the day it lies up in the centre of fields and is much less dependent on rough, unimproved, grassland interspersed by rushes than the Irish hare.

Ecology

The European hare is mainly crepuscular (active during dawn and dusk) and mostly observed in the centre of fields far from the edge where foxes (its main predator) typically patrol. It feeds predominately on grasses, mostly Italian ryegrass, but can take a wide range of native grasses and herbs, including flowers and seed heads, when available (Caravaggi *et al.*, 2015). The mating season is from January to June with peak births during March to August with two to three leverets per litter and three or four litters per year. Hares are not susceptible to myxomatosis but the degree to which their population dynamics is impacted by other diseases (e.g. European Brown Hare Syndrome virus) is unknown. Its main predators are the fox, domestic cat and buzzard.

Population

The introduced population in Mid-Ulster was estimated at up to 1,250 individuals during 2012-13 having likely increased since 2005-06 concomitant with its range expansion (Caravaggi *et al.*, 2015).

Neil Reid



LAGOMORPHS